**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 11th August 2024**

**Call To Worship                  Psalm 139:13-14**

You formed my inward parts;
    you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
    my soul knows it very well.

**Opening Prayer**

Loving God, thank You for the many blessings that we receive from You daily and especially for the wonderful gift of salvation, which we all have been given through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Thank You, that He died to take the punishment we deserve for our sins, and that He rose again to break the power of sin and death. Lord we praise You and worship You for all Your many blessings to us. Gracious God, we thank You for the gift of life. We know that each of us has been fearfully and wonderfully created and every part of our body is a miracle. Help us today to worship You as You deserve and respond to Your Word in faith and obedience. Amen.

**Hymn                                     A mighty fortress is our God**by ***Martin Luther***

<https://youtu.be/vyedsfF6hNk?si=lpRXcDleQGDywQ8t>

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;

Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.

For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;

His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;

Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God’s own choosing.

Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;

Lord Sabaoth, His name, from age to age the same, and He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God has willed His truth to triumph through us.

The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;

The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth.

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;

The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still: His kingdom is forever.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Bible Reading                     Joel 3:1-8**

“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

“What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily.For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples.You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border.Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will return your payment on your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away, for the Lord has spoken.”

**Reflection**

It’s always important to recognise what time frame prophecies are referring to, otherwise we are likely to misunderstand and misapply them. At the end of chapter 2 of Joel’s prophecy we were thinking about the latter days and concluded that this is likely about a time that is still to come. Our Bible reading today continues on from that theme, speaking in verse 2 of God gathering together all the nations of the Earth and judging them. Now clearly there have been times when God’s judgment has been brought against certain individual nations, but not all of them at once. This will only happen when Jesus returns in glory and will judge all peoples, living and dead.

In verse 1, God has spoken about restoring the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem. As we have previously said this is most likely figurative Israel rather than literal geographic or ethnic Israel. In other words, we are referring to those who have been adopted into God’s family through faith in Christ. Again, since the beginning of the Church until now there has been persecution of God’s people, whether by violence, disadvantage or ridicule. The restoration of the fortunes of God’s people will not come until the time when we will live in the nearer presence of the Lord forever. This is the wonderful future hope that is laid before us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

God speaks of the good He will do for His own people, before going on to speak of the punishment He will mete out against those who have opposed and oppressed them. In verse 3 we are given examples of how the nations have mistreated God’s people and it is quite horrific. They have been sold into slavery for worthless and passing pleasures. In verse 4 God begins to pronounce what He will do to these pagan nations such as the Philistines. We must note, however, that this is symbolic and refers to all those peoples who have rejected the Gospel and oppressed God’s people. It is as though they thought that they could punish God, but ultimately God will have the final word on them instead.

However long the evil may prosper it is not going to be forever. All those who have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross will be judged at the end of time and receive their just deserts. In thinking about this, we must remember that we will only escape this same punishment because of what God has done for us in Christ, and not because of any goodness or worthiness of our own. Those who reject God will ultimately be rejected by Him. In fact, God goes on to declare that the same terrible things that these nations have inflicted upon God’s people will be inflicted upon them at the hands of the one true and living God.

Any truly biblical message about the end of days must include two parts. Firstly, there must be a true pronouncement of the consequences of human sin, which is of course death and hell. Without this understanding human beings fail to understand the full consequences of rejecting the Gospel. Secondly, there must be a properly understood message of hope. This hope is not found due to any human effort or action but is rather entirely down to what God has done and has graciously given us through the gift of faith. We do not choose to follow Jesus Christ and place our trust in Him because that would mean that we have done something that in some small way earns our salvation. This simply cannot be! Instead, faith is a gift that God gives to those whom He has chosen from before the foundation of the world. There is nothing we can do to get this ‘faith’ – rather it is graciously given to us by God according to His own plans and purposes.

I wish to conclude our reflection today by turning our attention to the final words in verse 8. Here we read “for the Lord has spoken”. Behind this simple phrase is a very important point and that is that what God says is always true and trustworthy. If God has spoken something we know with absolute certainty that it is either true or is a true statement of something that will happen in the future. It is impossible for God to lie, and He knows the whole of history from ancient past to the very end of time and beyond. The Bible is the written Word of God and because of this we can trust it completely and know that everything that God has revealed to us through its pages is trustworthy and true. Who are we to question what God has said? Let us listen, trust and obey. Amen!

**Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank You for Your Word through which You have revealed Yourself to us and shown us Your ways. We thank You too, O Heavenly Father, that You are the unchangeable and unchanging God, whose promises to Your people stand firm forever and whose Word of truth cannot change. Thank You for the many insights into the plans and purposes written in the short prophecy of Joel, and that You have promised there will be a day when Your enemies will be routed, and Your Son, the Lord Jesus, will rule and reign as King. Give us discernment and understanding as we read Your Word and help us to apply it in our lives. Use us according to Your will, to bring Your Word to its fulfilment in the lives of all Your people. This we ask in Jesus’ Name and to Your glory, amen.

**Blessing**

Heavenly Father, help us hold fast to that which is good and turn away from all evil. Aid us to love and serve You, O Lord, always rejoicing in the love and sacrifice of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May Your blessing be upon us and remain with us always. amen.